

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 27

By Hackworth

A RESOLUTION urging the United States Congress to review and address the Social Security disability claims process.

WHEREAS, mired in antiquated processes and chronically underfunded, the Social Security disability claims process needs to be reformed; and

WHEREAS, in addition to disbursing millions of dollars in monthly benefit pensions to retirees and their survivors, Social Security also provides disability benefits to workers and their families should a worker become too sick to make a living; deciding who is eligible to receive benefits and hearing appeals from workers whose claims are rejected is at the heart of the claims process; and

WHEREAS, as the first wave of the 80 million member baby boom generation begins to fall into the Social Security safety net, Congress can no longer put off a systematic review of the Social Security disability claims process; and

WHEREAS, Comptroller General David M. Walker has stated that "When the Social Security disability program was created, the nature of the economy was different, the nature of the workforce was different, the status of medical technology was very different, workforce trends were very different. The program was designed primarily decades ago, and it made sense at the time. But like so many federal programs, they're not reviewed and reassessed in order to ascertain whether or not they still make sense for today and for tomorrow."; and

WHEREAS, the Social Security Administration received 2.5 million new applications for disability benefits in fiscal 2006 and denied 1.6 million; and

WHEREAS, those who are turned down have the right to appeal; an administrative law judge, paid by Social Security, is assigned to hear each case, and most who appeal are eventually approved for disability income through the program; and

WHEREAS, about 190,000 Tennesseans were receiving disability benefits in December of 2006, with nearly 27,000 caught up in the backlog of disability cases; and

WHEREAS, in Chattanooga, for example, disability applicants may wait 445 days for a decision from a judge on their disability request and up to three years if the claim is processed in a larger city; and

WHEREAS, congressional budget cuts, administrative errors, and an aging population have left the Social Security disability claims process in dire need of reform; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that this General Assembly hereby urges the United States Congress to act expeditiously to review and address the Social Security disability claims process.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this General Assembly strongly urges each member of the Tennessee Congressional Delegation to utilize the full measure of his or her influence to effect the passage of federal legislation providing for such reforms.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives is directed to transmit a certified copy of this resolution to the President and the Secretary of the United States Senate; the Speaker and the Clerk of the United States House of Representatives; and to each member of the Tennessee Congressional Delegation.